

The art of *Waldy* Simson

At the first glimpse of Waldy Ricardo Simson's atelier/home in the Santa Cruz countryside, you know you are in the midst of something extraordinary. The facade and floors are made entirely of tile mosaics in every shape, texture and color imaginable – a job that has taken eight years to complete. The strong wall surrounding the property is the sum total of many truckloads of stones, each of which Waldy painstakingly rolled and fitted together with mortar in what many in Aruba consider to be a lost art. The interior walls are covered with his works of art; the outside mosaic continues throughout on the remarkable floors.

As you walk through the atelier, you are struck by the versatility and scope of his talent. There is a tiffany glass rendering of the head of a girl in bold crimson and green; next to that, in the same media, is the back of a sad woman; above are profiles cut in paper. Turn around and you will find abstracts in paint created with a special rope technique. There are large painted canvases of ordinary scenes and faces, yet there is a quality that transcends their simplicity; the colors are bold and the messages are communicated by elements of powerful imagery bursting with emotion and meaning.

Waldy is as comfortable with tiffany, painting, paper cutting and engraving as he is with ceramics, music and poetry. "Just as a mother gives the same attention to all her children, I practice all disciplines... Knowing that when I am creative, I can bring pleasure to others makes me happiest, as an artist and human being," he explains. His goal of

making his works accessible to everyone is proceeding well; his tiffany art has been displayed in the Netherlands, Suriname, Bonaire, Jamaica, Aruba and, most recently, South Africa.

Waldy's art is largely self-taught. His many years of writing songs and poetry culminated in a book published in the Netherlands, including themes of faith, patriotism, human destiny, hope and freedom. His songs are often selected by choirs in Suriname and Aruba. In the 1990s, he created many realistic sculptures reflecting the ideal beauty of God and its manifestation in human earthly life. During a concert in Suriname some years ago, Waldy had a fortuitous meeting with Rufo Odor, Aruban choral director, teacher and cultural icon, and immigrated to Aruba ten years ago.

Most recently, Waldy has worked with clay, plaster, paper, lead, plate-glass and stained glass. In the last decade, influenced by the birth of his son, Jurio, and his life in Aruba, his art has become more colorful and abstract, sometimes reflecting a childlike quality. This dynamic artist continually experiments with new techniques and mixed media. His works have appeared at Aruba's national library in an exhibition celebrating his decade as an artist, as well as at the Institute of Culture, churches, office buildings, art galleries and private homes.

One of Waldy's most fulfilling moments was when his tiffany piece entitled *Amandla* (South African: freedom) became part of the permanent collection at the Nelson Mandela Museum in South Africa. "I created

Main pic: Entirely covered with mosaic tile, Waldy's home is a work of art in itself?
Below: *Amandla* is part of the permanent collection of the Nelson Mandela Museum.

it in the Netherlands, brought it with me to Aruba, but now it rests in the place where it belongs." In this work, an angelical female figure emerges from a dark-colored background bearing the message of the African National Congress, *Amandla*, engraved on the lighter-colored reflective glass. She herself is without color; her garment, hair and head tie bear the colors that appear on the ANC flag. The white-colored glass symbolizes the peaceful surroundings in which people of all races can live in South Africa, free from apartheid.

During the opening of the exhibition, "My gratitude" was played and his poems, "The Artist" and "Hope" were recited, all dedicated to Nelson Mandela, civil rights leader and former president of the ANC, on the occasion of his 90th birthday. Waldy's exhibition, consisting of 44 works of art, was made possible by funding from Aruba, the Netherlands and local organizations and individuals. For an appointment and directions to his Santa Cruz atelier, contact Waldy at 585-7472 or 562-6581 / waldysimson@hotmail.com.

